

# Algae in western Lake Erie eats into fishing business

By John Seewer, Associated Press 2:02 p.m. EDT August 29, 2015

**The greatest concern surrounding the algae blooms, which tint the water a ghoulish green color, is that they produce a toxin that can cause vomiting, diarrhea or liver damage in extreme cases.**



Algae washes ashore from Lake Erie at Maumee Bay State Park in Oregon, Ohio, in 2014.(Photo: Aaron P. Bernstein, Getty Images)

OAK HARBOR, Ohio — Thick mats of algae spreading across western Lake Erie in recent weeks appear to be pushing one of the region's most-prized sport fish to flee, forcing some charter boat captains to cancel trips. At least one told out-of-state visitors hoping to catch walleye to stay home for now.

Fishing guides who make their living on the lake say this year's algae bloom is quickly rivaling the worst they've seen in past years.

<http://www.freep.com/story/news/local/michigan/2015/08/29/algae--western-lake-erie-eats-into-fishing-business/71383504/>

"There are places out there where it looks like you're running through green mud," said Bob Witt, who runs a fleet of charter boats east of Toledo.

Scientists tracking the algae said Friday that the heaviest concentration is in the western third of the lake and that there aren't any blooms in the central or eastern areas near Cleveland or Buffalo, N.Y. The algae forecast in July predicted that this year's algae could be second only to one in 2011, when the bloom stretched more than 100 miles from Toledo to Cleveland.

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The greatest concern surrounding the algae blooms, which tint the water a ghoulish green color, is that they produce a toxin that can cause vomiting, diarrhea or liver damage in extreme cases. A year ago, those toxins contaminated the drinking water for 400,000 in the Toledo area and southeastern Michigan.

The blooms also are blamed for contributing to oxygen-deprived dead zones where fish can't survive, but less is known about how the algae affect the movements of the fish population. That research is ongoing.

"It's having some impact, but what that is we don't know," said John Windau, a spokesman with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

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Changes in habitat, weather, prey, and currents also could explain why walleye are few and far between in the waters between Toledo and the Lake Erie islands, Windau said.

Charter boat operators say the first question they hear is no longer about whether the fish are biting. It's now "how bad is the algae?" and "can I eat the fish?"

Ohio's wildlife agency advises that both walleye and perch from the lake are safe to eat based on tests over the past four years. "Even if we tell them it doesn't affect the fish, they are still skeptical," Witt said.

It's difficult to estimate how much business is down, most operators said.

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"I know there are a lot of boats sitting our marina that normally don't stay there," said Randy Lilly, a charter captain based just east of Toledo in Oak Harbor.

Dave Spangler, who has spent more than two decades taking groups on the lake, said the fishing was fantastic this year until the algae blooms began developing in early July.

Now the walleye have become so scare that he has discouraged some customers from coming out. He's canceled four trips in just the last few weeks.

"It ends up being more of a boat ride than a fishing trip," he said.

He's still taking groups out fishing for yellow perch, but he said he has to go out twice as far to get away from the algae and find perch. That adds up to a bigger gas bill each trip.

"We can get into cleaner water, but never completely out of the algae," Spangler said.

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